



# THE USER EXPERIENCE Touch Points and Testing

By Aaron Schmidt

TOUCH POINTS ARE ALL THE places your patrons come into contact with your library and its services. Things like your web site and databases, service desks, staff, programs, and even brochures.

One goal of User Experience Design is to help determine if any of those touch points are also pain points—places of contact that make patrons confused, aggravated, or disappointed—and fix them if they are.

As discussed in my March column on user research (*LJ* 3/1/10, p. 24), one of the best ways to find out what your users' experience is like is to test them. But this kind of user testing is not about assessing the intelligence or patience of our users. It's about testing designs to make sure they effectively do whatever it is they're intended to do.

Testing is important because no matter how thoroughly we set out specifications for our web sites and other in-house projects, there's always room for improvement. In the design world, the continually repeating process of testing and then making appropriate changes is called iterating. Here are two ways you can improve your library through the process of iteration.

## Usability testing

If you want a good web site you absolutely must conduct usability testing. Full stop. Luckily, it isn't difficult. Essentially, all you have to do is watch people use your site. Here are some steps to get you started.

**1. Identify which part of your site you want to make better.** Is there a particular section that's critical to the mission of the library or any current initiatives? Then, come up with a list of related tasks your testers can perform. For example: ask users to find out when the next story time is happening, or to pretend they are looking for a book recommendation. Avoid questions of opinion like, "Do you like the colors on the site?" It is pos-

sible to do testing of a more exploratory nature, asking users to click through a site and talk about the process, but this is generally less effective at identifying specific improvements to make.

**2. Recruit testers.** Unless your web site is highly specialized, it makes almost no difference whom you test. Clearly, if you're going to be testing the portion of your site meant for senior citizens and you have easy access to that demo-

about fixing everything at once. That's the power of an iterative process. If you follow through after creating a schedule, you'll always be somewhere in the process of improving your web site.

## UX partners

As with our web sites, we're often so accustomed to our library buildings, procedures, and services it's impossible to have any perspective. This can pre-

## Implementing small changes on a regular basis makes the process iterative

graphic, recruit them. Otherwise, just find people other than librarians. Offer some kind of compensation for their time if possible.

**3. Conduct the test.** It helps to write a script that you can read to participants. The script should set people at ease, assuring them that the web site is the real subject of the test, not them. It should also include instructions for each task. Try to keep participants as talkative as possible, since hearing their thought processes as they navigate your site will provide many insights.

**4. Record the results.** The facilitator can attempt to take notes, but it can be difficult to administer the test and write at the same time. Having another person act solely as the recorder is one solution. Some people choose to use screen recording software like Camtasia so that the tests can be reviewed. While effective, this method can be a time sink. Another alternative is to have a group of people in a different room observe the tests as they occur. This can be accomplished with a video camera and monitor, or a second display attached to the computer used for testing.

**5. Finally, prepare and discuss the test results.** Figure out which issues are glaring. Determine what changes to make, and implement them. Then, start the whole thing over again. Don't worry

vent us from recognizing pain points, even if they're severe. Luckily, there is a way around it.

Building upon Brian Herzog's *Work Like a Patron Day* ([bit.ly/wlapd](http://bit.ly/wlapd)), find a nearby library to partner with in order to give and receive honest criticism about what it's like to use your respective services. Relinquish your librarian privileges, and be an honest-to-goodness patron at your partner library. You'll notice some nice things that you might want to implement in your own institution. You'll notice some things that seem inconvenient or difficult. Here's the important part: report them all, and do it candidly. This arrangement will take both trust and tact but, if done well, can be immensely valuable. Providing small reports and implementing changes on a regular basis make the process iterative and less overwhelming.

Creating a library that continually improves through iteration can take a huge organizational shift. Some people feel uncomfortable with quick change, but the nimbleness of the iterative process is what makes it so powerful.

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